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123 156 I had thus far progressed, with high-wrought feelings of pleasure, when the two or three chiefs, who had been seated around the lodge, and whose portraits I had before painted, arose suddenly, and wrapping themselves tightly in their robes, crossed my room with a quick and heavy step, and took an informal leave of my cabin. I was apprehensive of their displeasure, though I continued my work; and in a few moments the interpreter came furiously into my room, addressing me thus:—"My God, Sir! this never will do; you have given great offence to the chiefs—they have made complaint of your conduct to me—they tell me this is a worthless fellow—a man of no account in the nation, and if you paint his picture, you must instantly destroy theirs—you have no alternative, my dear Sir—and the quicker this chap is out of your lodge the better."

The same matter was explained to my sitter by the interpreter, when he picked up his robe, wrapped himself in it, plied his fan nimbly about his face, and walked out of the lodge in silence, but with quite a consequential smile, taking his old position in front of the door for awhile, after which he drew himself quietly off without further exhibition. So highly do Mandan braves and worthies value the honour of being painted; and so little do they value a man, however lavishly Nature may have bestowed her master touches upon him, who has not the pride and noble bearing of a warrior.

000 I spoke in a former Letter of Mah-to-toh-pa (the four bears), the second chief of the nation, and the most popular man of the Mandans—a high-minded and gallant warrior, as well as a polite and polished gentleman. Since I painted his portrait, as I before described, I have received at his hands many marked and signal attentions; some of which I must name to you, as the very relation of them will put you in possession of many little forms and modes of Indian life, that otherwise might not have been noted.

574 About a week since, this noble fellow stepped into my painting-room about twelve o'clock in the day, in full and splendid dress, and passing his arm through mine, pointed the way, and led me in the most gentlemanly manner, through the village and into his own lodge, where a feast was prepared in a careful manner and waiting our arrival. The lodge in which he [342] dwelt was a room of immense size, some forty or fifty feet in diameter, in a circular form, and about twenty feet high—with a sunken curb of stone in the centre, of five or six feet in diameter and one foot deep, which contained the fire over which the pot was boiling. I was led near the edge of this curb, and seated on a very handsome robe, most ingeniously garnished and painted with hieroglyphics; and he seated himself gracefully on another one at a little distance from me; with the feast prepared in several dishes, resting on a beautiful rush mat, which was placed between us (PLATE 62).

262 264 415 The simple feast which was spread before us consisted of three dishes only, two of which were served in wooden bowls, and the third in an earthen vessel of their own manufacture, somewhat in shape of a bread-tray in our own country. This last contained a quantity of *pem-i-can* and *marrow-*

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fat; and one of the former held a fine brace of buffalo ribs, delightfully roasted; and the other was filled with a kind of paste or pudding, made of the flour of the "*pomme blanche*," as the French call it, a delicious turnip of the prairie, finely flavoured with the buffalo berries, which are collected in great quantities in this country, and used with divers dishes in cooking, as we in civilized countries use dried currants, which they very much resemble.

A handsome pipe and a tobacco-pouch made of the otter skin, filled with k'nick-k'neck (Indian tobacco), laid by the side of the feast; and when we were seated, mine host took up his pipe, and deliberately filled it; and instead of lighting it by the fire, which he could easily have done, he drew from his pouch his flint and steel, and raised a spark with which he kindled it. He drew a few strong whiffs through it, and presented the stem of it to my mouth, through which I drew a whiff or two while he held the stem in his hands. This done, he laid down the pipe, and drawing his knife from his belt, cut off a very small piece of the meat from the ribs, and pronouncing the words "Ho-pe-ne-chee wa-pa-shee" (meaning a *medicine* sacrifice), threw it into the fire.

He then (by signals) requested me to eat, and I commenced, after drawing out from my belt my knife (which it is supposed that every man in this country carries about him, for at an Indian feast a knife is never offered to a guest). Reader, be not astonished that I sat and ate my dinner *alone*, for such is the custom of this strange land. In all tribes in these western regions it is an invariable rule that a chief never eats with his guests invited to a feast; but while they eat, he sits by, at their service, and ready to wait upon them; deliberately charging and lighting the pipe which is to be passed around after the feast is over. Such was the case in the present instance, and while I was eating, Mah-to-toh-pa sat cross-legged before me, cleaning his pipe and preparing it for a cheerful smoke when I had finished my meal. For this ceremony I observed he was making unusual preparation, and I observed as I ate, that after he had taken enough of the k'nick-k'neck or bark of the red willow, from his pouch, he rolled out of it also a piece of the "*castor*," which it is customary amongst these folks to carry in their tobacco-sack to give it a flavour; and, shaving off a small quantity of it, mixed it with the bark, with which he charged his pipe. This done, he drew also from his sack a small parcel containing a fine powder, which was made of dried buffalo dung, a little of which he spread over the top, (according also to custom,) which was like tinder, having no other effect than that of lighting the pipe with ease and satisfaction. My appetite satiated, I straightened up, and with a whiff the pipe was lit, and we enjoyed together for a quarter of an hour the most delightful exchange of good feelings, amid clouds of smoke and pantomimic signs and gesticulations.

The dish of "pemican and marrow-fat," of which I spoke, was thus:—The first, an article of food used throughout this country, as familiarly as we use

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and the remainder is gathered and dried on the cob, before it has ripened, and packed away in "*caches*" (as the French call them), holes dug in the ground, some six or sever feet deep, the insides of which are somewhat in the form of a jug, and tightly closed at the top. The corn, and even dried meat and pemican, are placed in these *caches*, being packed tight around the sides, with prairie grass, and effectually preserved through the severest winters.

Corn and dried meat are generally laid in in the fall, in sufficient quantities to support them through the winter. These are the principal articles of food during that long and inclement season; and in addition to them, they oftentimes have in store great quantities of dried squashes and dried "*pommes blanches*," a kind of turnip which grows in great abundance in these regions, and of which I have before spoken. These are dried in great quantities, and pounded into a sort of meal, and cooked with the dried meat and corn. Great quantities also of wild fruit of different kinds are dried and laid away in store for the winter season, such as buffalo berries, service berries, strawberries, and wild plums.

The buffalo meat, however, is the great staple and "staff of life" in this country, and seldom (if ever) fails to afford them an abundant and wholesome means of subsistence. There are, from a fair computation, something like 250,000 Indians in these western regions, who live almost exclusively on the flesh of these animals, through every part of the year. During the summer and fall months they use the meat fresh, and cook it in a great variety of ways, by roasting, broiling, boiling, stewing, smoking, &c.; and by boiling the ribs and joints with the marrow in them, make a delicious soup, which is universally used, and in vast quantities. The Mandans, I find, have no regular or stated times for their meals, but generally eat about twice in the twenty-four hours. The pot is always boiling over the fire, and any one who is hungry (either of the household or from any other part of the village) has a right to order it taken off, and to fall to eating as he pleases. Such is an unvarying custom amongst the North American Indians, and I very much doubt, whether the civilized world have in their institutions any system which can properly be called more humane and charitable. Every man, woman, or child in Indian communities is allowed to enter any one's lodge, and even that of the chief of the nation, and eat when they are hungry, provided misfortune or necessity has driven them to it. Even so can the poorest and most worthless drone of the nation; if he is too lazy to hunt or to supply himself, he can walk into any lodge and everyone will share with him as long as there is anything to eat. He, however, who thus begs when he is able to hunt, pays dear for his meat, for he is stigmatized with the disgraceful epithet of a poltroon and a beggar.

The Mandans, like all other tribes, sit at their meals cross-legged, or rather with their ancles crossed in front of them, and both feet drawn close under their bodies; or, which is very often the case also, take their meals in a re-

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clining posture, with the legs thrown out, and the body resting on one elbow and fore-arm, which are under them. The dishes from which they eat are invariably on the ground or floor of the lodge, and the group resting on buffalo robes or mats of various structure and manufacture.

The position in which the women sit at their meals and on other occasions is different from that of the men, and one which they take and rise from again, with great ease and much grace, by merely bending the knees both together, inclining the body back and the head and shoulders quite forward, they squat entirely down to the ground, inclining both feet either to the right or the left. In this position they always rest while eating, and it is both modest and graceful, for they seem, with apparent ease, to assume the position and rise out of it, without using their hands in any way to assist them.

These women, however, although graceful and civil, and ever so beautiful or ever so hungry, are not allowed to sit in the same group with the men while at their meals. So far as I have yet travelled in the Indian country, I never have seen an Indian woman eating with her husband. Men form the first group at the banquet, and women, and children and dogs all come together at the next, and these gormandize and glut themselves to an enormous extent, though the men very seldom do.

It is time that an error on this subject, which has gone generally abroad in the world, was corrected. It is everywhere asserted, and almost universally believed, that the Indians are "enormous eaters;" but comparatively speaking, I assure my readers that this is an error. I venture to say that there are no persons on earth who practice greater prudence and self-denial, than the men do (amongst the wild Indians), who are constantly in war and in the chase, or in their athletic sports and exercises; for all of which they are excited by the highest ideas of pride and honour, and every kind of excess is studiously avoided; and for a very great part of their lives, the most painful abstinence is enforced upon themselves, for the purpose of preparing their bodies and their limbs for these extravagant exertions. Many a man who has been a few weeks along the frontier, amongst the drunken, naked and beggared part of the Indian race, and run home and written a book on Indians, has, no doubt, often seen them eat to beastly excess; and he has seen them also guzzle whiskey (and perhaps *sold* it to them) till he has seen them glutted and besotted, without will or energy to move; and many and thousands of such things can always be seen, where white people have made beggars of them, and they have nothing to do but lie under a fence and beg a whole week to get meat and whiskey enough for one feast and one carouse; but amongst the wild Indians in this country there are no beggars—no drunkards—and every man, from a beautiful natural precept, studies to keep his body and mind in such a healthy shape and condition as will at all times enable him to use his weapons in self-defence, or struggle for the prize in their manly games.